



# P O N D E R O S A

# M I N E F I G H T E R

## HARRIS COUNTY ESD #26

Summer 2005

### Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association, Inc. Board of Directors

**Tom Wyka** - President  
Cypresswood resident

**Bob Hook** - 1st V-P  
Ponderosa resident

**Dan Vogel** - 2nd V-P  
Westador resident

**Dave Perry** - 3rd V-P  
Fire department representative  
Ponderosa resident

**Bill Wurdeman** - Secretary  
North Forest resident

**Brandon Huffman** - Treasurer  
Westador resident

### HCESD #28 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Bob Palnau** - President,  
Northview resident

**Dan McDermott** - Vice  
President, Ponderosa resident

**Thomas Reno**, Treasurer,  
Ponderosa Resident

**Edson Dronberger** - Assistant  
Treasurer, Westador resident

**James Chatterton** - Secretary,  
Cypresswood resident



## Calling 9-1-1? Maybe Not...

So, you're thinking about getting VoIP? You've heard it's cheaper...that you can make an unlimited number of local and long-distance calls for a low, flat fee. Sounds pretty appealing, doesn't it? Before you make any decisions, take a step back. Purchasing VoIP as your only phone service could mean that your family could be wasting life-saving minutes in an emergency situation.

### What is VoIP?

In layman's terms, VoIP, short for Voice over Internet Protocol, is a broadband technology that routes telephone calls over the Internet rather than phone lines. Your traditional telephone service is generally analog and connected over a single static pathway. VoIP is almost entirely digital and may take one or more different paths over the Internet to reach the called party.

### To Buy or Not to Buy

There's not much argument that VoIP, or a version of its current state, is where our phone service is headed. And, for the most part, it's already a viable competitor to traditional voice services. Today's controversy revolves mainly around VoIP's viability as a *full-service* product. More specifically, does the 9-1-1 emergency number, now used universally in emergency situations, work as it should? Because, lets be honest, saving a little money today, isn't worth what you could lose in an emergency tomorrow.

### The 411 on VoIP and 9-1-1

With your traditional telephone service, the 9-1-1 emergency line is a given. It's there when you need it...three simple numbers that can save your life. It's reasonable that most folks assume the same 9-1-1 capability is automatic on VoIP. But, in many cases, it's not. In fact, a portion of VoIP providers don't provide an emergency calling option at all. That's a pretty scary proposition. Some VoIP providers offer *VoIP Basic Emergency Calling*, in which a call is routed to the general access line at a law enforcement agency **without** location information, and possibly without your callback number. Also a scary situation. *VoIP Enhanced 9-1-1 Calling*, an option that only certain VoIP providers now offer, is when your call is routed over a dedicated 9-1-1 network and arrives at your local 9-1-1 dispatching center with both location and callback number information.

*Continued on page 2*

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF...

### T-Minus and Counting

You may recognize this as space shuttle talk, but The Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department (PVFD), which has evolved into a high performance customer service-centered delivery system, also uses this phrase as a way to describe what we do for you.

We monitor, or “count” how we do things, and we do that with qualified and committed people – our most important resource. At the Ponderosa VFD, we are continually evaluating our product - responding to your needs with all of the resources available to us. We are even in the process of finalizing a strategic plan that will be our road map to the future. It's all about providing you with the best services possible.

We also “count” our service by realizing our insurance company ratings. When it comes to our capabilities, the Ponderosa VFD is within the top 4% in the

entire nation. This rating is extremely important. It not only means that you get top quality service in your time of need, but it also saves you money when you renew your property insurance each year. This return on investment is multiplied every single year. To ensure you're benefiting as you should be, remember to tell your insurance agent that we are a Public Protection Class 3.

We “count” on dollars. It's just a reality...we simply can't perform for you without it. Did you know that our entire budget produces high performance services at about \$22 per capita? Full career systems cost over \$125 per capita. What does this mean? It means we can't continue at this pace.

Our district continues to grow and it has become necessary for us to look at employing more paid personnel. A new fire engine



costs over \$400,000. Everything we do to maintain and improve our service costs money. And our volunteer members, although not on the payroll, do receive benefits...they are not “free”. The bottom line? Tax rates will need to be increased within the next couple of years. But don't panic! When we count our tax rate, we see that it is small and the benefits are huge.

We are there for you...no matter what the circumstance. Please support us in ensuring that the services you receive are the best they can be. As always, consider us your silent sentinel. 9-1-1 is our calling card. ●

## VOIP -- Continued from page 1

### Our Recommendation

VoIP technology is exciting and, in time, it will more than likely be commonplace. But, as with many technologies, we recommend that you hold off until the kinks are worked out. This 9-1-1 issue is serious. It can mean the difference between a good or bad outcome in an emergency situation. A solution could be near. By next year, Congress is expected to update phone laws to leave VoIP services largely free of regulation but require them to provide *Enhanced 9-1-1*. The Federal Com-

munications Commission recently ruled that VoIP must provide E-911 capabilities by October 2005. However, another issue is that there is no current mechanism in place for VoIP to fund 9-1-1 systems. So, if possible, hold off until these issues are worked out.

If you already have VoIP and want to make sure you're getting the proper 9-1-1 service, consider the following:

- Check your service providers Web site for emergency calling features.
- If applicable, activate the emergency calling feature of your service plan.

- Consider purchasing a back-up power supply. If the power is out, your VoIP service may be out too.
- Inform children, babysitters, and visitors about your VoIP service.

- Post your address and call back phone number near your phone.
- Know the 9-1-1 center that should receive your call and their general access phone number.
- Consider keeping a land line phone for accessing 9-1-1 emergency services.
- Ponderosa VFD's direct emergency line is 281-444-FIRE (3473). ●

# SEASONAL SAFETY TIPS

Warmer weather and longer days are now upon us, and we all know what that means! It's time to get back to those long-neglected projects like spring cleaning, home repairs and yard work. And you also might be lacking up for your first outdoor walk or jog of the season. These are all beneficial and worthwhile ventures, but they can also pose a variety of health and safety hazards.

To help ensure everyone in your family stays safe this season, we offer up the following and suggest you post them where they can be seen.

## Spring Cleaning...

Decided to clean up the debris that's accumulated in storage sheds and garages over the winter? Take these tips into account before doing so:

- Household and pool chemicals, paints, and poisons should be properly marked and stored under lock and key, away from children's reach. Dispose of any that are leaking, expired, or that look bad.



- When cleaning up hazardous chemicals wear rubber gloves and follow the safety directions on the packaging. Never mix chemicals in the same container. Make sure you're properly disposing of these materials. Never put them into the trash or pour them down the drain.
- Make sure gasoline and cleaning fluids are well marked and

stored in a cool, dry place away from the house and out of the reach of children and pets. Use only approved containers for gasoline storage.



- Never use gasoline to clean skin, clothes, auto parts, or floors.
- Clean up work areas. Put dangerous tools, adhesives, matches, or other work items away from children's reach.

- Check your barbecue grill for leaks and cracks, and be sure to store any propane tanks away from your house and garage.

- Remove all fire hazards, including stacks of rags, newspapers, and magazines. Pay special attention to the spaces around your furnace, hot water tank, fireplace, space heaters, and dryer, as well as under the stairs.

## Home Repairs...

Thinking of tackling those home repairs? On average, about 145,000 people visit emergency rooms each year due to ladder mishaps.

- Read the manufacturer's instructions that come with the ladder. They contain guidelines for weight and height limits as well as for the proper use of their product.

- Inspect the ladder before using

it to make sure there are no loose or broken rungs/steps.

- Make sure the ladder is the right height for the job. Many accidents happen when people overextend their reach.

- Never stand on a ladder's bucket shelf or top step.

- Make sure the ladder is completely open and that all its feet are planted on a firm, level surface. Extension ladders should not be placed at an angle that is too extreme.

- Avoid using a metal ladder near electrical sources.



- Face the ladder when climbing down and make sure your weight is centered between the two sides.

"These are just a few safety precautions to consider," says Fred Windisch, Ponderosa Fire Chief. "It's also a great time to replace your smoke detector batteries, make sure your fire extinguishers are placed in proper locations around your home, and ensure you have a working flashlight and battery-powered radio for storms. By taking the right precautions in warmer weather, you and those around you can enjoy a safe, healthy season." ●



# Answering YOUR Questions...

**Q. On average, how many minutes will pass from the time I call to report an emergency to the time that a fire engine or ambulance arrives?**

**A.** Ponderosa VFD provides fire, rescue and emergency medical first response. Our average response time for all responses in our district is less than 6 minutes from receipt of your 9-1-1 call. Depending on where you live will determine the actual time.

**Q. How long does it take for 9-1-1 dispatchers to process calls?**

**A.** Cypress Creek EMS operates the Emergency Communications Center that serves 8 fire departments and Cypress Creek EMS. They also dispatch for the Harris County Fire Marshal Hazardous Materials Response Team. The vast majority of process times are about 45 seconds. Some calls may take longer depending upon information provided. Cellular telephones may not currently be accurately located, but there is progress in that regard.

**Q. How long does it take for firefighters to get on the road once they are notified they have an alarm?**

**A.** Depending on time of day or day of week will determine "turnout time". Weekdays, the paid staff will turn out in one to two minutes. Nights and weekends the turnout time will vary between two minutes and five minutes related to volunteers staffing their respective stations or home response. We must also remember that call "severity" will determine member response priority. An automatic alarm, controlled burn, or minor medical

needs will produce longer turnout time.

**Q. How are the stations staffed? by volunteers, by part-time personnel or full-time personnel?**

**A.** Weekdays have five paid personnel on duty at Headquarters in the Ponderosa Subdivision. Nights and weekends volunteers staff their respective stations (3) at varying times, and all members respond from their homes when dispatched. All members carry voice pagers that receive alerts and dispatch information. Internal procedures determine who and where they will respond, either directly to the scene or to staff apparatus. The budget situation will not allow for more paid personnel without significant effects to normal operational expenses and capital investments.



**Q. Can the department muster between 12 to 15 firefighters at a fire within 10 minutes of an alarm?**

**A.** Absolutely!

**Q. What role do simultaneous calls play in your response times and staffing?**

**A.** Simultaneous calls can certainly affect response times, but the type of request for service is the driver. We have wonderful automatic aid from our neighboring departments as well as mutual aid from other departments, but response times increase due to distance traveled. A structure fire in our district will require all three of our stations and two fire stations from other departments, whereas minor calls require only a single apparatus response.

**Q. Would transportation improvements speed response?**

**A.** Increased traffic on FM1960 and other roads is a huge challenge for your fire department and Cypress Creek EMS. We have asked for the Texas Department of Transportation to install traffic signal preemption devices, but at this point it is only a dream. You can do your part by **Moving Right For Signs And Lights**. Slow down, and move right as much as possible.

**Q. What level of service does the department provide for fire prevention, public education, fire investigation, technical rescue, and hazardous materials?**

**A.** We have a very active fire prevention and public education division that addresses various age groups. Fire investigation is handled via the Harris County Fire Marshal. We have partnered with some of our mutual aid departments to assist our base technical rescue team and hazardous materials trained members.

**Q. Are your physical resources adequate -- including fire stations, training facilities, fire apparatus, and personal protective safety equipment?**

*Continued on page 7*

# SO YOUR TEEN IS ABOUT TO START DRIVING...

Obtaining a driver's license is a real milestone in your child's life, but it can be a transition that is a little scary for you.

We all worry about our children's safety, and we are especially sensitive to this when our teens begin driving. We've heard the horror stories of automobile accident statistics among new drivers and we've seen young boys screeching out of parking lots. The reality is, the statistics are real. So much so, that on January 1, 2002, Senate Bill 577 implemented the Texas Graduated Driver License (GDL) Program. Based on the program developed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) at the U.S. Department of Transportation, the entry-level driver licensing program gives young drivers more time to learn the complex skills required to operate a motor vehicle.



Basic requirements for obtaining a license have not changed – a person under age 18 must still show proof of driver education, verification of enrollment and attendance in school (or high school graduation or GED), proof of social security number and proof of identification – but actual driving requirements have changed. Here are the two phases minors must now complete before receiving a non-restricted license (as outlined on the Texas Department of

Public Safety's site – [www.txdps.state.tx.us](http://www.txdps.state.tx.us)):

## Phase One

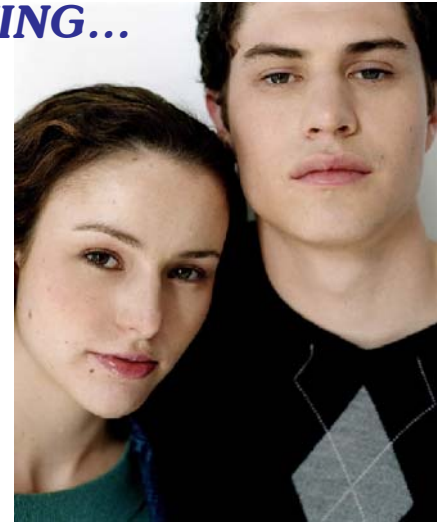
Applicants under the age of 18 must hold an instruction permit or hardship license for a minimum of six months prior to the issuance of a provisional Class A, B, or C driver license. The driver must be accompanied by a person, 21 years or older, during the operation of the vehicle. Once the applicant has held a valid instruction permit or hardship license for a minimum of six months, has reached the age of 16 for a Class C license, and has completed both the classroom and driving portions of driver education, they are eligible to "graduate" to Phase Two.

## Phase Two

Phase two restricts the driving privileges of persons under the age of 18 during the six-month period following the issuance of an original Class A, B or C driver license (Provisional License). They may not operate a motor vehicle with more than one passenger in the vehicle under the age of 21 who is not a family member. They also cannot drive between midnight and 5:00 a.m., unless it is necessary for the driver to attend or participate in employment or a school-related activity or because of a medical emergency. Upon completion of the six-month period, the restrictions no longer apply.

For a more detailed description of the program, visit the Texas Department of Public Safety's site.

Since implemented, states all over the country have seen significant reductions in accidents among 16 and 17-year-olds. This law, although most likely unpopu-



lar with your teen, is a necessary and effective step in protecting new drivers. And it sure offers us, as parents, a little more peace of mind! ●

## Why do we Need the GDL Program?

- In 2002, 6,322 young drivers and passengers aged 15-20 died in motor vehicle crashes.
- Approximately 36% of all deaths for people aged 15-20 are from motor vehicle crashes, according to data from the National Center for Health Statistics.
- Crashes involving teenage drivers (those 15-20 years old) cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$42.3 billion in 2001.
- In 2002, 23% of the young drivers (ages 15-20) involved in fatal crashes were drinking.
- In 2002, 45% of 15-20 year-old fatalities occurred in speed-related crashes.
- States with night-time driving restrictions show crash reductions of up to 60% during restricted hours.

Source: "Traffic Safety Facts" April 2004 (can be accessed at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov))



# MEET OUR BOARD MEMBERS



**Bill Wurdeman**, a Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association, Inc. board member since 1984, views the Board's role as very clear and specific. "We are here to review all procedures and approve all expenditures," he explained. "It's a careful system of checks and balances."

Bill and his wife, Kathleen, moved to Houston 30 years ago from a suburb of Kansas City, called Lee's Summit. Their three children, Craig, Todd and Kit were quite young at the time and quickly took to life in Texas. In fact, it was through their two boys, who were involved in Ponderosa VFD's Junior Firefighter Program, that Bill became interested in giving back to his new community.

"I felt then, and still do today, that it's important to stay involved in your community. It's a good way to stay in touch with what's going on in your area and I truly enjoy working with the different leadership teams in the fire association and department. Everyone works very well together and we're confident that our efforts have had a positive impact."

When asked if he and Kay had any plans to move back to Lee's Summit, Bill responded, "This is our hometown now. We're Texans and we aren't going anywhere!"



Ask **Dan Dronberger** what he enjoys most about his years as an Emergency Services District #28 Board Member, and he'll tell you again and again: "It's the people. From the firefighters, to the Chief, to my fellow Board members, they're just an extremely dedicated group."

When it comes to Dronberger, "dedicated" is an understatement. He has been serving the Ponderosa VFD for **over 30 years** now. His service began in 1975 as Treasurer of the Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Association, Inc., carried forward through the formation of ESD #28 in 1984, and still continues today.

"It is our role to ensure, with the funds available, that our fire department is well-equipped and serving the community as best they can. It's a balancing act between

the right tax rate and the fire department's needs."

In 1973, Dronberger and his wife, Sue, moved from Los Angeles to Houston with their two young sons, David and Jeffrey. And it was less than two years later that Dan joined several fellow Shell Oil co-workers to help raise money for Ponderosa VFD. Those were the days of door to door donation requests.

"For years now, I've been watching the personnel grow. I've seen junior firefighters become senior firefighters and I've seen their children follow in their footsteps. It has been, and still is, an extremely rewarding experience."

In 1994, Dronberger retired from Shell Oil, after 37 years. Since then, Dan and Sue have enjoyed spending time with their children and grandchildren, and traveling all over the world...to Canada each summer, cruises around South America, safaris in Africa and everywhere in between!



**Sparky says,**  
**"Have a family escape plan and practice what to do in an emergency. This can save lives if a fire occurs!"**

## YOUR Questions...

Continued from page 4

**ment -- to meet the level of risk in this community? Do you have adequate training programs? What's the plan to pay for repair or replacement of fire apparatus?**

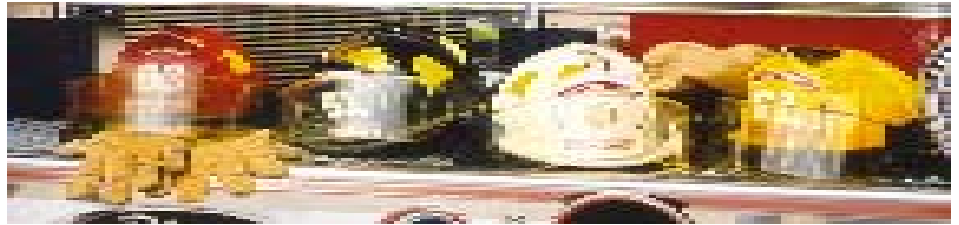
**A.** The Ponderosa VFD has outstanding facilities and apparatus. The **Curtis J. Cook Training Facility** is at our fire station #3, and our personal protective equipment is state-of-the-art. We have a preventative maintenance program and a twelve-year apparatus rolling plan. Our latest three fire engines are in a lease purchase program and will be replaced after seven years of service.

**Q. What is the community's ISO rating for fire protection?**

**A.** We enjoy a Class 3 insurance rating that is within the top 4% of our nation's fire service. This value-added benefit saves our building owners tens of thousands of dollars each year through reduced insurance premiums.

**Q. What does it cost us for your services?**

**A.** Emergency Services District #28 has a tax rate of six cents per hundred dollars of assessed evaluation providing revenue of about \$1.3 million each year. A \$100,000 property pays \$60 per year in real estate taxes. This equates to per capita cost of less than \$25. Full paid departments cost over \$125 per capita. ●



## MEET YOUR PONDEROSA FIREFIGHTERS...



**Dan Vogel** has spent more than half of his young life at Ponderosa fire stations. At 16 years old, he became an official member of the Ponderosa VFD team. But it was four years prior that he and his buddy, Robert Logan (also now a firefighter at PVFD), started hanging out at the fire station.

"It's all I ever wanted to do," Vogel said. "Being a firefighter was my childhood dream." And it is a dream fulfilled. Vogel is a full-time firefighter/paramedic in Houston (HFD), a volunteer Lieutenant and

a duty crew member at Ponderosa VFD.

In 1996, Vogel attended Texas A&M's Fire Academy and EMT training and returned to Ponderosa VFD upon graduation from the program. It has been ten years since Vogel began as a firefighter at Ponderosa, and although he has held full-time positions elsewhere – with Cypress Creek EMS, Village Fire Department and now Houston Fire Department, he has always stayed on part-time at his first home. "Ponderosa is where I started. We're all friends and family here."

"I'll be a firefighter forever," Vogel explains. "Knowing that I've saved lives with the emergency skills I've been taught; knowing that people are walking around today because of something I was able to do for them, you just can't beat that."

When not at the fire station, you can find Dan spending time with his fiancée, Heather, or at his family's lake house in Toledo Bend, East Texas.

*Continued on page 8*

**MOVE RIGHT  
FOR  
SIRENS & LIGHTS  
Ponderosa Volunteer Fire Department**



## MEET YOUR PONDEROSA FIREFIGHTERS...

For **Marti Stein**, being a volunteer firefighter means hard work and a feeling of accomplishment. Whether through fighting fires or as the Public Education Coordinator for her Fire & Life Safety Program, she is dedicated to making a difference in this community.

Stein, born and raised in Detroit, moved to Houston with her husband, Harvey, and two daughters, Ronna and Lisa, in 1981. After several years as a sales representative, Marti decided to move her life in a different direction; a direction that would bring her the growth she was craving. At about that same time, Marti's daughter had a friend whose father was a member of the Ponderosa VFD. While visiting with him one day, his pager went off and he was called to a small grass fire at Kuykendahl and 1960. He asked her if she'd like to come along.

"It wasn't so much the excitement of the ride in the truck or the fire that impressed me, it was the sweat, the physical work," Marti said. "It just felt like there was an end result to all their hard work; that as an individual, or as part of a team, you could really make a difference."



In 1985, Marti joined the Ponderosa VFD and in 1987 she began her successful Fire & Life Safety Program. The program includes in-service fire safety training for companies and educational programs for children in daycare and elementary schools.

"I try to teach age-appropriate safety tips," Stein explained. "The kids in daycare really seem to learn from puppets. For example, my fire breathing dragon teaches them about smoke detectors. Young children are also taught not to talk to strangers, so

we outfit their teachers in turn-out gear. That way, if they are ever in a situation where a firefighter is involved, they'll feel like it's someone they know."

The program has resulted in a number of success stories. "In 1990, I was in New Zealand, and called home to check on my family," Stein said. "They told me that there had been an apartment fire and a child had been temporarily trapped, but she remembered what 'Firefighter Marti' taught her and she got out alive. You just can't put a price on that." ●

**PONDEROSA**  
**FIREFIGHTER**  
HARRIS COUNTY ESD #28

17061 ROLLING CREEK DR.  
HOUSTON, TX 77090



**NEW**

**This publication is intended for the residents within the Ponderosa VFD service area. If you received it in error, we hope that you'll still read it and utilize the fire safety information.**